

**Rhode Island Department of Education  
and  
Warwick Public Schools**

**Face-to-Face Meeting Report and Agreement**

March 25, 2002

**Overview**

**Introduction:** The "Face-to-Face" meeting between the Warwick Public Schools and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) occurred on March 25, 2002. This meeting was scheduled as a result of five schools being identified as "Low Performing" based upon four years of student assessment data. The "Face-to-Face" meeting is the first step in an ongoing process of accountability for school improvement entitled Progressive Support and Intervention. It is designed to allow school districts to address their capacity to engage in the four elements of school improvement: self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The meeting report is a public recitation of the steps to be taken in the district to increase student achievement in English language arts and mathematics over the ensuing year.

**Schools:** Oakland Beach Elementary School, Gorton Junior High School, Pilgrim High School, Warwick Veterans Memorial High School, Warwick Area Career and Technical Center

**Attending from Warwick:** Robert Shapiro, Superintendent; Richard Rouleau, Assistant Superintendent; Robert Bushell, Director of Elementary Education; Kathy Desrosiers, English/language Arts Supervisor; Russell Rapose, Science and Math Supervisor; Vincent Hawkins, Curriculum Coordinator; Richard D'Agostino, Oakland Beach School Principal; Beverly-Ann Powell, Oakland Beach School Teacher and Chair of School Improvement Team; Eloise Boyer, Grants Coordinator; Stephen Lowery, Director of Social Services; Doug Rademacher, Warwick Area Career and Technical Center School Improvement Team Member; James DeLuca, Director, Warwick Area Career and Technical Center; Victor Mercuro, Pilgrim High School Principal; Coleen Griffith, Department Head and School Improvement Team Member; Kenneth Sheehan, Gorton Jr. High School Principal; Heather Fielding, Gorton Jr. High School Teacher; Donald Brown, Warwick Veterans High School Principal; Samuel Holtzman, Vice President, Warwick Teachers Union.

**RIDE Staff:** David V. Abbott, Interim Assistant Commissioner; Mary Ann Snider, Director, Office of Assessment; Diane Schaefer, Director, Office of Instruction; Susan Rotblat-Walker, Education Specialist, Office of School Improvement and Accountability; Kim Carson, Education Specialist, Office of Special Needs; Elliot Krieger, Media Relations; Mat Santos, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of Equity and Access; Richard Latham, School Improvement Specialist, Office of School Improvement and Accountability; Mary Cerullo, Reading Specialist, Office of Instruction; Paul Williams, Office of Research, High School Reform and Adult Education.

## **RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation**

Interim Assistant Commissioner David V. Abbott welcomed the group, and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting. He explained that each meeting follows a similar format. The school district is asked to begin with a presentation on the status of school and district efforts to improve student achievement in English Language arts and mathematics. RIDE staff then responds to the school district's presentation, and adds comments based upon data analysis performed prior to the meeting. District and school officials next describe future plans to add or modify action plans to improve teaching and learning, and to identify existing or prospective barriers to implementation. The meeting is designed to conclude with shared expectations of the respective roles of the school, school district, and RIDE in supporting ongoing school improvement efforts. Commissioner Abbott concluded by noting that the meeting would result in a report to be made public at an upcoming meeting of the Warwick School Committee.

## **School District Presentation**

Superintendent Shapiro explained how the district had assembled all of the principals of its low performing schools, and that each school was prepared to discuss in detail its school improvement efforts. In addition, he discussed the formation of a district-level Internal Review Team. This team includes Richard Rouleau, Assistant Superintendent, Robert Bushell, Director of Elementary Education, Kathy Desrosiers, English/language arts Supervisor, Russell Rapose, science and math Supervisor, and Vincent Hawkins, Curriculum Coordinator. Eloise Boyer was identified as the district's school improvement coach. The Superintendent outlined a support and intervention process detailed in attachment #1. He further stated that the district was taking a harder look at the action plans of its low performing schools, and that all school improvement plans will be data driven. The data will be based on SALT visit reports, SALT data, and state assessments.

Robert Bushell, Director of Elementary Education detailed the steps being implemented to help Oakland Beach Elementary School become a high-performing school (See attachment #2). Richard D'Agostino, Principal of Oakland Beach described some of the obstacles the school currently faces. He cited the high mobility of students; for example 300 students enter and/or exit the school in a given year. In addition, he believes that the school must compensate for the lack of family support for students and poverty, which affects fifty to sixty percent of the student body. He further noted that the staff has spent a lot of time on assertive discipline. The principal also discussed some of the efforts that the school has instituted to improve teaching and learning. These efforts included the implementation of a federal reading grant, which has reduced the retention rate of third and fourth graders, piloted looping in the primary grades and the development of a five-week summer school. He concluded by disclosing that the superintendent had designated the school as a priority.

Dave Abbott asked if the school had discretion in the implementation of its professional development activities. The response noted that professional development activities are designed to be consistent with the district's strategic plan, and that the Professional Development Team had identified ELA and math as priorities. Robert Bushell, Director of

Elementary Education explained that a lot of the district's professional development activities are "top down". He also said that although professional development is ongoing throughout the school year, the lack of substitutes is a major problem. Superintendent Shapiro stated that professional development would be a topic of discussion for the new collective bargaining agreement.

Mary Ann Snider, Director of Assessment, noted that the district has three intensive efforts underway and inquired how is the district coordinating the required professional development to support these efforts. Elementary Ed. Director Bushell responded that these initiatives have not been implemented at the same time.

Diane Schaefer of the Office of Instruction questioned whether math teachers feel they can ask for certain types of professional development. Diane also asked if teachers are able to ask for help (in regards to specific professional development activities), what happens after them and how are lessons learned during these activities reflected in classrooms, across grades to impact the curriculum. Principal D'Agostino responded, this happens in curriculum meetings and teachers are invited (during their unassigned periods) to observe their colleagues implementing new initiatives.

Russell Rapose, Science and Math Supervisor explained that efforts to improve math performance have been slower. He noted that although similarly performing schools are working together in their professional development activities related to math and that the district has had to repeat the same workshop over as many as three times because of the lack of subs. In addition, he said that district has identified low achieving math students and implemented a summer math camp for them. Ken Fish of the Office of School Improvement and Accountability asked if the camp was also a professional development opportunity for teachers. Russell responded that they were not.

Dave Abbott asked if the district had a mechanism for supporting parents. Eloise Boyer, Grants Coordinator, answered that the district needed help in that area. Principal D'Agostino disclosed that although the parent center is housed at his school, parental involvement is low.

Richard Rouleau, Assistant Superintendent, took issue with the classification of the Career and Technical Center as a low performing school, pointing out the students took their academic classes in their sending schools. He noted that Gorton and Vets are in the same feeder system that starts at Oakland Beach Elementary. Consequently, these schools have the same problems.

Stephen Lowery, the Director of Special Education disclosed that the district is converting its present special education program model to a service delivery model with a focus on inclusion at the elementary level. He noted the University Assistance Program (UAP) and the Rhode Island Technical Assistance Program (RITAP) are providing technical assistance for the inclusionary practices. Eleven out of twenty schools are providing inclusionary services. In addition, the district has instituted an intensive resource model by using teachers on a voluntary basis. Further, all but ten special education teachers have been trained in the Wilson Reading Method, and the district is currently looking into a remedial math program. The district's goal is that these two programs will be the only pullout programs with all other special educational services provided through an inclusion model. At the secondary level they

have been exploring inclusionary practices. For students with behavior challenges, they have been looking into alternative school models. The weighting of students was also discussed. The teacher's union contract specifies that, at the secondary level, one special education student is counted as one and one half students. At the elementary and jr. high levels one special education student is counted as two students. Teachers are paid an overage for exceeding the class size but the potential is there to exclude sped students due to class size numbers but this has not happened because teachers have been paid the required overages.

### **RIDE Analysis**

The inter-disciplinary team from RIDE made a series of observations based on its review of planning documents, the District's Strategic and Technology Plans, the respective School's Improvement Plan/Professional Development Plan (Article 31), InfoWorks Data, SALT Survey Information, SALT Visit Reports, SPED School Support Visit Reports, and In\$ite Data.

#### *Oakland Beach Elementary School:*

- Results indicate that 40% of its students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over a three-year period;
- The mathematics, ELA, and writing subtests indicate targets were not met in either the high or low target categories resulting in the school being classified as a non-improving school.

#### *Gorton Junior High School:*

- Results indicate that 35% of its students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over the previous three-year period;
- Gorton is considered an improving school in the area of English/language arts with improvement in the seven out of ten of the high and low target categories in the ELA and writing subtests;
- The school's mathematics subtests indicate gains in the area of math skills in the low target category and a slight increase in the high target category; and
- The math problem solving scores show gains in both high and low target categories with the math concepts scores revealing declines in both high and low performance categories.

#### *Pilgrim High School:*

- Results indicate that 37% of their students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over the previous three-year period;
- The mathematics subtests show gains in math problem solving in both the high and low target categories;
- Math concepts subtests revealed gains in the low target category and a less than 1% increase in the high target category;
- In the area of math skills the school showed a decrease in the high and low performance categories;

- ELA scores in basic reading improved in the high target category with no improvement in the low target category and high and low target scores improved in the areas of reading analysis and interpretation;
- A significant increase was seen in the writing effectiveness scores in the high target category with a decrease in low target scores and both groups showed a decline in the area of writing conventions; and
- Both high and low performing groups did not meet targets in the RI Writing Assessment.

*Warwick Veterans Memorial High School:*

- Results indicate that 37% of their students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over the previous three-year period;
- The mathematics subtests show that the school is improving in math concepts and math problem solving for both high and low target categories;
- The math skills subtest showed a significant decrease in performance in both the high and low target categories; and
- With the exception of a decrease in the low target scores in the area of writing conventions, ELA scores improved in all other assessment areas including the RI writing assessment for both high and low performing students. Consequently, Vets is classified as an improving school in math and English/language arts.

**RIDE/District Agreement**

Superintendent Shapiro and Assistant Commissioner Abbott identified the following immediate strategies to improve Warwick's low performing schools:

- The creation of a district Internal Review Team to monitor, on a quarterly basis, the progress of each school's improvement plans (Compact for Learning).
- The requirement that all school improvement plans be data driven.
- The review of all revised school improvement plans and action plans for each low performing school.
- Provide district level technical assistance in the areas of curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional development, and the use of funds of the low performing schools.
- The active participation of the district's Curriculum Coordinator, English/language arts supervisor, and the Math Supervisor on each low-performing school's improvement and action planning team.
- Provide an outside facilitator to facilitate each school improvement team's revisions to their school improvement plans and action plans.

- The introduction of the Connected Math series in grades 6 through 11. The development of a new Problem-Solving Curriculum with two additional math classes each week for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- The implementation of a professional development plan focusing on rubric design, standards-based instruction, writing across the curriculum and interesting instruction (Thematic Units).
- Implementation and training in the new Harcourt reading series – Collections and in the new mathematics, Scott-Foresman/Additions – Wesley, Investigations and Connected Math implementation.
- Implementation of an all day and extended kindergarten.
- Piloting of looping in the primary grades.
- Creating a preschool program at the Oakland Beach Elementary School.
- Lowering class size at Oakland Beach Elementary using the class size reduction allocation.
- Implementing an English language arts and mathematics summer camp for low-performing students.

We at the Department applaud the district's efforts to meet the needs of all students through inclusionary practices. In addition, we noted that the district recognized the major climate and culture impediments toward change. We encourage the institutionalization of school improvement efforts to address problems such as inconsistencies in student achievement across schools, barriers to implementing structural reform at the middle schools, increased parent and community involvement, and the development of a viable teacher mentoring program. Further, Warwick needs to focus its school improvement efforts to support meaningful and consistent adoption of standards-based instructional practices. We think these changes would be fostered by greater teacher participation in activities such as shadowing students and groups/committees of teachers reviewing student work.